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RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #0187/01 0292126
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7436
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0433
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000187

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND NEA/IPA; PRM FOR FRONT OFFICE AND
PRM/ANE; NSC FOR KUMAR; DEPT PLEASE PASS TO USAID FOR
ANE/MEA:MCCLOUD/BORODIN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [PREF](#) [GZ](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: GAZA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REMAINS SERIOUS, WITH
QUALIFIED IMPROVEMENTS

REF: JERUSALEM 2094

¶1. (SBU) Summary: One year after the end of the war in
Gaza, the coastal territory remains in a challenging
humanitarian situation, with modest improvements in access
for humanitarian and commercial goods. The average number of
monthly shipments into Gaza increased by nine percent in 2009
compared to the previous year, but was driven primarily by
essential aid requirements during and following the conflict.

A relaxation in access beginning in December 2009 allowed
for shipments of glass and some other previously banned
materials, as well as exports of strawberries and carnations.

Many construction materials, including those for UN projects
for the electricity, water, and sewage networks and for the
health sector, remain in short supply. The private sector
continues to rely heavily on goods brought in through
tunnels. End summary.

Post-Conflict Aid Drives 2009 Figures

¶2. (SBU) The volume of humanitarian and commercial shipments
into Gaza in 2009 was nine percent higher than that of the
previous year, according to OCHA statistics. Even so, it was
only about a quarter of the pre-2007 volume. According to
OCHA statistics, the number of truckloads of supplies into
the Gaza Strip increased in 2009 (32,590 truckloads) by
nearly nine percent from 2008 (29,959 truckloads). Nearly 25
percent of the 2009 shipments were humanitarian, versus less
than nine percent in 2008, according to OCHA data.

¶3. (SBU) The increase in shipments and the significantly
higher proportion of humanitarian aid (basic foodstuffs,
blankets, and medicine) in 2009 likely reflect Gaza's urgent
humanitarian needs following December 2008-January 2009
combat operations, rather than meaningful improvement in
access. For the first three months of 2009, immediately
following the January 2009 cease-fire, the average number of
truckloads per month was more than 3,200, compared to an
average of less than 2,550 truckloads per month for the last
three months of 2009. In contrast, the first five months of
2007 (prior to Hamas's takeover in Gaza in June 2007) saw an
average of 12,350 truckloads per month cross into Gaza from
Israel. If daily figures for January 2010 truckload
shipments into Gaza hold steady, the total number of
shipments for that month will be well below the monthly
average for 2009. Note: According to the GOI, there has
been a 28 percent increase in shipments into Gaza between
2008 and 2009. It is unclear how the GOI reached this
conclusion. End note.

Some Reconstruction Materials Permitted,

¶4. (SBU) In December 2009, the GOI expanded its list of non-edible commodities allowed into Gaza, though most of the items had been permitted in 2009 on a temporary basis. Most notably, the GOI in late December 2009 began to allow glass to enter Gaza for the first time since the December 2008-January 2009 conflict. As of January 25, 2010, 57 truckloads (32,110 boards) of glass entered Gaza, according to PalTrade. Local contacts reported that small businesses are selling glass for approximately NIS 100 (USD 27) per square meter, approximately twice the price in Israel. The reported GOI cap of 100 trucks per month still does not meet local requirements, according to the UN.

¶5. (SBU) In January 2010, the GOI permitted the entry of other previously banned materials, including plastic for greenhouses (seven truckloads) and water coolers (36 truckloads). In addition, most of the remaining construction materials for Phase A of the Northern Gaza Emergency Sewage Treatment project were allowed into Gaza in December 2009 and January 2010.

¶6. (SBU) Supplies for large-scale reconstruction, including those needed for essential UN projects -- such as cement, rebar, water pumps, and equipment for the electricity networks -- remain restricted. Forty truckloads are still waiting to enter Gaza for reconstruction of the electricity network; 10 were allowed through in early December 2009. According to the WFP, 77 percent of Gazans are "food insecure" or "vulnerable to food insecurity." Most in those

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categories receive food aid from humanitarian agencies. According to Oxfam, due to the destruction of the water systems during December 2008-January 2009 combat operations, tens of thousands rely on clean water distribution from aid agencies and hundreds of thousands buy privately tankered water.

¶7. (SBU) In the health sector, 15 of Gaza's 27 hospitals and 43 of its 110 primary health care facilities were damaged or destroyed in December 2008-January 2009 combat operations, and have not yet been rebuilt due to a lack of materials. Contacts regularly cite the shortage of medical equipment -- x-ray machines, other electronic devices, and spare parts -- due to Israeli restrictions. There are few obstacles to imported medicines, though coordination problems between the Palestinian Authority and authorities in Gaza (who must answer to Hamas) frequently result in shortages.

Fuel Update

¶8. (SBU) Cooking gas remains insufficient to meet demand. According to OCHA, local need varies between 5,000 and 7,000 tons of cooking gas per month. Gaza received 1,739 metric tons in October 2009, 1,202 in November 2009, and 2,614 in December 2009. Note: Cooking gas is too unstable to be transported in large volumes through the extensive network of tunnels linking Gaza to Egypt, though it is now arriving in canisters. End note. One reason for the shortage, according to contacts, is the GOI's decision to shift fuel transfers to Kerem Shalom (at the convergence of Egypt, Israel, and the southern tip of the Gaza Strip), which has no storage tanks and has a lower capacity than Nahal Oz, the previous principal fuel transfer station (located north of Kerem Shalom and between the Gaza Strip and Israel), which officially closed on January 3, 2010.

¶9. (SBU) A local contact estimated that 40 percent of bakeries have recently converted their ovens to run on diesel instead of cooking gas. Chicken farms, which require cooking gas to keep chicks warm, have also suffered considerable losses (400,000 chicks died in November, according to the UN)

due to the lack of cooking gas. According to contacts in Gaza, live chickens now cost NIS 16 (USD 4.30) per kilogram, in contrast to NIS 10 (USD 2.70) per kilogram before the onset of the severe cooking gas shortage in the fall. Diesel and petrol, supplied through the tunnels as well as official crossings, continue to meet local demand.

Two Gazan Exports

¶10. (SBU) Following extensive lobbying by the Dutch government, the GOI permitted exports of carnations beginning on December 10, 2009, and strawberries beginning on January 3, 2010. According to PalTrade, Gazan farmers had exported 19 truckloads of carnations (2.3 million stems) as of January 28, 2010, an increase over the figures for that point in the 2008-2009 season (1.3 million stems) and the 2007-2008 season (1.5 million stems). Gaza has the capacity to export 55 million stems (as it did in the beginning of the decade) during the mid-November to mid-May export season.

¶11. (SBU) PalTrade reported that Gazan farmers have exported 28 truckloads (46.1 metric tons) of strawberries as of January 28, 2010. The strawberry export season lasts from mid-November to mid-February, and Gaza's export capacity is 2,300 tons. Gaza did not export any strawberries in 2009 and only exported 70 tons in 2008, in comparison to 1,345 tons in 2007 and 2,089 tons in 2006.

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